

swung through north at noon, and dying down in the northwest in the afternoon.

The conspicuous white rump and long tail (the fork is not always discernible) separates this species in the field from the heavier and short-tailed Spine-tailed Swift, which has not yet been satisfactorily identified in this State.

—G. M. STORR, Floreat Park, and G. M. DUNNET, Nedlands.

Occurrences of the Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*).—

This tern is regarded as being rare in Western Australia. Serventy and Whittell (*Handbook of Birds of Western Australia, 2nd ed.*, p. 128) say "This is one of the fresh-water terns, but may occur also on estuaries and sea-coasts. It appears to be quite rare in Western Australia and has never been reported in the South-west." The following occurrences seem worth putting on record.

Carnarvon. July 8, 1952. Two Gull-billed Terns were seen near the Railway Bridge. As this was my first acquaintance with the bird I passed them by at first as Crested Terns until their habit of hawking for food over the sandy beach and mud flats drew my attention. Then the short, strong, black beak and all black head served to identify them.

Carnarvon. September 27, 1953. Two black-headed and five grey-headed birds, with black around the eye, were seen hawking over the sand in the same place as the previous year. The following calls were heard. First a single-noted shrill call. The black-headed birds also gave a harsh call reminiscent of that of the Roseate Tern. The grey-headed birds appeared to be soliciting the black-headed for food so giving the impression they were young birds. The whole party rose from the sand and, uttering harsh alarm rattles, attacked a Red-backed Sea Eagle.

Carnarvon. October 24, 1952. Four Gull-billed Terns were seen in the same spot as in previous years. Only one had a black cap. Again the harsh chatter and shrill single call were heard. The birds were hawking for food over the sand near the water's edge.

Morawa, August 16, 1953. Six Gull-billed Terns were seen flying over a fresh-water lake about two miles west of the town. All had black heads with no white showing on the forehead. The harsh chattering call was again heard. Later in the same day another party of 18 birds was seen.

It would seem the birds are in much the same category as the Banded Stilts, moving over the country to sites where food is plentiful and nesting in much the same fashion as the Stilt. Serventy and Whittell give only one nesting record for Western Australia and, owing to the rarity of the birds, nesting sites are likely to be found by accident rather than design.

—VINCENT SERVENTY, Subiaco.

Pellet Production in *Corvus*.—The regurgitation of the indigestible materials swallowed in the food of eagles, hawks, and owls in the form of coherent pellets has been well studied. Though pellets are known to be produced by members of several other

groups of birds, not a great deal of information has been collected relating to the habit in these groups.

Some observation on *Corvus*, made at Erikin (a Central Wheatbelt district some 118 miles east of Perth) during December, 1954, showed that they roost in pairs in the larger trees, and that they return each night to particular trees—indeed, to particular branches. Under the regular roosting sites, among the accumulation of faeces, there lay a considerable number of pellets. The three roosting sites first discovered all yielded pellets; two further trees under which pellets were found later proved to be roosting sites. No pellets were found away from a roosting site. Thus it seems reasonable to attribute the pellets to *Corvus*, even though no direct observations of pellets being actually ejected were made.

Corvus is abundant at Erikin, but the species was not conclusively determined. However, I am informed that in an adjacent area between Kellerberrin and Kwolyin, all three Western Australian species are found, but the Crow (*C. ceciliae*) and the Little Crow (*C. bennetti*) are both rather rare. This, together with the type of call and the size of the Erikin birds, leads me to believe that the species responsible for the pellet is the Raven (*C. coronoides*). No specimen was collected, so this opinion remains unconfirmed.

The pellets measured from 1.5 to 2.5 cm. in diameter, and were usually about 4.5 cm. long. Their dry weights were usually about 2 gm., but a few exceptionally large ones ranged up to 5 gm. They are quite compact when fresh, but break up quickly in the weather. They consist almost entirely of husks of wheat, but with some straw, and some unbroken grain. Some have a superficial layer of sand, but this is probably due to sand having been blown up against the fresh, moist pellet. None contained any of the typical constituents of pellets — fur, feathers, bone or chitin.

They seem to be produced about once a day. On one occasion a heavy rainstorm broke up all of the pellets under a certain tree. After three days five new pellets were found under the roosting site. An attempt to discover whether the pellets were ejected in the morning or in the evening yielded no results.

Apparently there are no records of pellet production by *Corvus* in the Australian literature. However, B. W. Tucker (*British Birds*, vol. 38, no. 3, p. 50) has summarised the records of pellet production in the British literature and finds that the habit is known to occur in four British *Corvus*.

Raven (*C. corax*, not *coronoides*) and Carrion Crow (*C. corone*) produce pellets similar to those produced by birds of prey. Rooks (*C. frugilegus*) when feeding on grain eject pellets composed of husks. Jackdaws (*C. monedula*) also produce pellets, though the type is not described.

Probably further observation would reveal that the habit is general for the whole genus.

—L. SEDGWICK, University Hostel, Crawley.